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August 17, 2007

President Clinton, Governor Gibbons, Senators Reid, Feinstein, Ensign, members of Congress, Secretary Kempthorn, elected officials and community leaders, I am privileged to address you on behalf of California, and it is a pleasure to be here at Lake Tahoe to celebrate a decade of accomplishments since the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program was launched in 1997. I want to thank Senator Reid for bringing all of us together for this special event.

I remember very well the run up to the 1997 event. Senator Reid, you had envisioned a plan to sell Federal Government Land around Las Vegas, but keep the proceeds in Nevada. Since the land was under the authority of the BLM, the issue arrived on my desk at the Department of the Interior. Dozens of meetings later with your staff, Senator Feinstein's staff and my colleague at USDA, Rich Rominger, the Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program was in place with California and Nevada governments on board. Then the penultimate happened, a historic summit here at North Shore with President Clinton, Vice President Gore, Governors Wilson and Governor Miller, Senators, members of Congress -well actually all of you and more. As important as your presence was, the commitments made by all the agencies to save Tahoe were the crowning achievement of the event.

This has truly been a continuing bipartisan success story, with California Governors Wilson, Davis, and Schwarzenegger each demonstrating their strong commitment to the Tahoe basin. As proud as I am that California has contributed 40 percent, the largest share, of this \$1.1 billion program to protect the Lake's water clarity, forest health and air quality, I am even more pleased that Nevada, the Federal Government, local governments on both sides of the Lake, and thousands of individuals and businesses contributed money, time and hard labor into the successful EIP effort.

The collaborative effort of federal, state, and local partners in California and Nevada has lead to the acquisition or improvement over 15,000 acres of sensitive ecosystems and wildlife habitat, significantly reduced runoff to the lake from city and county roads and state highways, and reduced forest fuels on more than 20,000 acres. And equally important, we have shown that we can move beyond the conflicts of the past in the basin by investing in our common future. But we also know that this is just the beginning - a down payment on the investments that will be necessary to protect the environmental, economic, and social health of the Tahoe basin. Federal, state, and local agencies are now working with local communities around the basin to develop the vision and the framework for the next decade of investments that will be needed to sustain and advance the progress we have made.

To be successful, this EIP update must focus on several challenges that were not given much attention ten years ago, including transportation, invasive species, and the impacts of global climate change. Just this past Wednesday, for example, UC Davis released a new "State of the Lake" report demonstrating that the Tahoe basin's climate is warming up, which may have profound impacts on snowfall levels, lake clarity, and other natural features that are so vital to the region's environment and economy.

Fortunately, this time we will have the benefit of a world-class laboratory, the newly established Tahoe Science Consortium, and years of research from the best minds in the country on the most cost-effective ways to improve the lake's clarity and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire. That continuing research will be the centerpiece of our next decade of investments in the Tahoe basin.

The key to meeting these challenges is for all levels of government to continue the kind of cooperation and coordination they've shown in helping survivors recover from the Angora fire. In just a month since the fire, almost every one of the 255 homes destroyed is registered for debris removal; 60 percent have been cleared of debris; and ten are ready for new foundations. That's the kind of collaborative effort that makes me confident that we can meet our broader challenges in the basin.

In addition, many of those same agencies have developed a comprehensive plan to restore the burned area, to protect neighborhoods from flooding, and to protect the lake's clarity. Earlier today I attended the announcement of a restoration plan, which includes over \$8 million in federal, state, and local funding commitments to address immediate restoration priorities before this winter season.

Beyond the Angora restoration plan all agencies must accelerate their efforts to reduce forest fuels in the Tahoe Basin, and work with the new Tahoe Basin Fire Commission to evaluate our existing regulations. We simply cannot afford to rest while our forests remain overstocked, our communities are at risk, and the lake's clarity is threatened.

None of this is possible, of course, without close cooperation with our friends and colleagues in Nevada and Washington, so I want to again thank Senator Feinstein, Senator Reid, Senator Ensign, Secretary Kempthorne, Governor Gibbons, and others for providing the leadership - and the funding - to make this program a success. I look forward to another decade of sound investments in the future of this magnificent basin.

-Lt. Governor Garamendi